

August 31, 2007

Ryan Maughan
Division of Water Quality
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street, 15th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Maughan:

This letter is directed to the State Water Resources Control Board and the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board in advance of the joint workshop on the Regional Board's Irrigated Lands Program (ILP) to be held in Clovis on September 13, 2007. This letter is also pertinent to the upcoming Regional Board workshop on updating the Tulare Lake Basin Plan.

As we all know, water quality in the San Joaquin Valley is of vital interest to many thousands of residents, farmers, and other business owners. Addressing salinity issues is critical for the viability of our agricultural economy, while keeping groundwater free of contaminants is a fundamental need of basin residents, who overwhelmingly rely on wells for their drinking water. This letter focuses on steps the state and regional boards must make in three critical areas to protect drinking water quality.

First, the Regional Board, directly and through the water coalitions created to implement the ILP, must monitor and report groundwater contamination as well as surface water contamination. As I understand it, minimal Regional Board resources are currently dedicated to groundwater monitoring. Even if the coalitions are made directly responsible for groundwater monitoring, additional Regional Board staff resources may be necessary to guide the work of the coalitions in this area. If the necessary staff resources are lacking, I encourage the Regional Board to submit the appropriate budget change proposals for the 2008-09 budget year to add the necessary staff. I am happy to work with you to secure additional resources for this purpose as a member of the Assembly Budget Committee, and would be happy to personally recommend to the appropriate cabinet-level officials that the budget augmentation be approved.

Second, in order to provide clear objectives and standards to the water quality coalitions, basin plans should be updated promptly at the time of the triennial reviews. As you know, Water Code Section 13242 requires that implementation programs for basin plans include the actions necessary to achieve water quality objectives, a timeline for these actions to take place, and monitoring to determine compliance with the objectives. The Tulare Lake Basin Plan, however, appears to lack specific timelines, and staffing levels identified in the 2002 Triennial Review are

inadequate to provide the guidance that water quality coalitions need to enforce and monitor for compliance with water quality objectives under the ILP. If staff resources necessary to regularly update basin plans and supervise water quality coalitions are lacking, I again encourage the Regional Board to request additional staff via budget change proposals. I will endeavor to support these budget requests in any way that I can.

Third, the Regional Board should actively assist water districts and communities — especially those with contaminated wells — in exploring surface sources of drinking water. Several San Joaquin Valley communities, including Coalinga and Orange Cove near my district, already use surface water as a source of drinking water. Other communities, such as Cutler-Orosi, are exploring new ways of accessing existing surface water supplies to minimize the impact of contaminated wells. The prospect of San Joaquin River restoration and new recirculating canal infrastructure could offer still other communities easier access to surface water supplies. The Regional Board should work with the Department of Public Health and other state and local stakeholders to provide technical assistance to communities in developing their surface water drinking supplies. As the agency responsible for preventing and mitigating groundwater contamination, the Regional Board should take responsibility to help find solutions for communities where contamination has been allowed to reach unsafe levels.

I believe the Irrigated Lands Program is necessary and can indeed work in the best interests of Central Valley residents and farmers. However, water quality coalitions need stronger guidance from the Regional Board in order to effectively prevent, mitigate, monitor, and report the contamination of groundwater. I am eager to assist you in the Legislature in procuring whatever budget resources you need to effectively monitor groundwater, update basin plans, and explore surface sources of drinking water.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in advance of the joint workshop. I look forward to continuing our strong collaborative relationship on behalf of the people and industry of the Central Valley.

Sincerely,

JUAN ARAMBULA
Assemblymember, 31st District

cc: Dr. Karl Longley, Chair, Central Valley Regional Water Board

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